

# School Arson Fires

## *A guide for School Administrators*

Nationally, arson is the leading cause of fires in educational buildings. Cigarette lighters are the leading ignition source of school fires in Washington State. Arson is a crime too dangerous to ignore. In Washington State arson combined with suspected arson has been the leading cause of fire deaths. Arson robs communities of valuable assets in lives and property. Report all fires in accordance with RCW 19.27 and with International Fire Code 401.3, "In the event an unwanted fire occurs on a property, the owner or occupant shall immediately report such condition to the Fire Department . . . No person shall, by verbal or written directive, require any delay in the reporting of a fire to the fire department."

### 1 Prevention

- ☐ **Do not allow matches, lighters or smoking materials on school property.**
- ☐ **Cleaning and Maintenance**  
Trim or remove shrubbery and be sure there are no combustible items stored near the outside of buildings.
- ☐ **Illuminate Building Exteriors**  
Motion activated lighting is effective and inexpensive. Trim or remove shrubbery and signs that obstruct the view of the building from the street.
- ☐ **Consider fencing the property.** Woven wire fences with locked gates limit access without providing privacy for the arsonists.
- ☐ **Surveillance Cameras** can prove effective in gaining information about the ignition source of a fire.

### 2 Protection

- ☐ **Know your school's fire protection system.**  
Be familiar with the type of fire protection system at your school. Know the location of pull stations and whether you school is protected by fire sprinklers.
- ☐ **School Fire Drills --** Actively participate in monthly school fire drills.
- ☐ **Know your school district's policy.**  
Most school districts have policies regarding building security and incidents in school buildings. Be familiar with emergency contact numbers. Keep a current list of all building key holders.
- ☐ **Document**  
Document any suspicious activities, noting the date, time and description of vehicles or persons. Patrols also can be effective.

### 3 Intervention

- ☐ **Fire Department -** Arson is a seriously underreported crime. School fires are also underreported. Remember, schools are required to report all fires, whether the fire is extinguished or still burning, to the fire department in accordance with Uniform Fire Code 1302.2 adopted by WAC 212.12. Early identification of an arson fire and its ignition source can lead to successful community based intervention strategies for youth that set fires.
- ☐ **Law Enforcement -** A criminal investigation should be conducted by law enforcement. Firesetting is arson if there is a purposeful plan to destroy property by setting a fire. Motive and intent must be established. When determined to be a criminal act of arson, firesetting carries with it serious consequences which may include arrest, trial, conviction, restitution and possibly incarceration. Local Crime Stoppers programs have been effective in gaining arson information. The Arson Alarm Foundation has an information award program that can be accessed at 1-800-55-ARSON or at [www.arsonalarm.org](http://www.arsonalarm.org).
- ☐ **Adapted-CISD -** As a post-violence intervention, an Adapted-Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) model is recommended for student populations that have been victims of school violence or a witness to it. An Adapted-CISD model uses both a separate debriefing for parents and later, a joint student-parent debriefing. The school counselor should be consulted to facilitate the debriefing.

**Resources:** *International Fire Cod, Section 401.3; RCW 19.27; United States Fire Administration, Arson Awareness Week Campaign; <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fire-service/arson/arson-aaw1.shtm>; Arson Alarm Foundation*

